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WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A network topology for an ATM network, the network topology comprising:

a source network element;

at least one intermediate network element; and

5 a distributed virtual path connecting said source network element and said intermediate network elements, said distributed virtual path including a virtual circuit originating from said source network element and a virtual circuit originating from at
10 least one of said intermediate network elements.

2. The network topology of claim 1, wherein said distributed virtual path originates from said source network element and terminates at said source
15 network element.

3. The network topology of claim 1, wherein said distributed virtual path originates from said

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source network elements and terminates at a
destination network element distinct from said
source network element.

5 4. The network topology of claim 1, wherein
at least one of said network elements is a computer.

 5. The network topology of claim 1, wherein
at least one of said network elements is a
10 satellite.

 6. The network topology of claim 3, wherein
said destination network element performs bandwidth
allocation for said distributed virtual path.

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 7. The network topology of claim 1, wherein
said distributed virtual path is unidirectional.

 8. A method of arranging distributed virtual
20 paths within an ATM network, the method comprising:

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establishing a source network element for a distributed virtual path;

establishing at least one intermediate network element for said distributed virtual path; and

5 connecting said source network element to at least one of said intermediate network elements using a distributed virtual path;

establishing a virtual circuit originating from said source network element; and

10 establishing a virtual circuit originating from at least one of said intermediate network elements.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the step of connecting further comprises:

15 connecting said distributed virtual path back to said source network element.

10. The method of claim 8, the method further comprising:

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establishing a destination network element for
said distributed virtual path; and

terminating said distributed virtual path at
said destination network element.

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11. The method of claim 8, wherein the step of
connecting further comprises connecting to at least
one computer.

10 12. The method of claim 8, wherein the step of
connecting further comprises connecting to at least
one satellite.

13. The method of claim 11, the method further
15 comprising the step of:
performing bandwidth allocation for said distributed
virtual path at said destination network element.

14. A distributed virtual path comprising:

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a virtual path including a virtual circuit originating from a source network element and a virtual circuit originating from at least one intermediate network element.

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15. The distributed virtual path of claim 14, wherein said distributed virtual path originates from said source network element and terminates at said source network element.

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16. The distributed virtual path of claim 14, wherein said distributed virtual path originates from said source network elements and terminates at a destination network element distinct from said source network element.

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17. The distributed virtual path of claim 14, wherein said distributed virtual path is unidirectional.